The BLUE DOMERS' NEST

JEAN FINLEY

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The
Blue Domers Series

By JEAN FINLEY

THE BLUE DOMERS

THE BLUE DOMERS' ALPHABET ZOO

THE BLUE DOMERS IN THE DEEP WOODS

THE BLUE DOMERS AND THE WISHING TREE

THE BLUE DOMERS UNDER WINTER SKIES

THE BLUE DOMERS AND THE MAGIC FLUTE

THE BLUE DOMERS' NEST

THE BLUE DOMERS AND THE HIDDEN SHANTY

Diana Pitts

"Ah," said Weezy, "Isn't this Mrs. Oleander Underwood?"

(Frontis) *(The Blue Domers' Nest).*

THE BLUE DOMERS SERIES

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By JEAN FINLEY

ILLUSTRATED

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The BLUE DOMERS' NEST

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THE BLUE DOMERS' NEST

CHAPTER I

NEW NEIGHBORS

"I WOULDN'T mind doing dishes so much, if they would just stay washed," said Bert, hitching his mother's apron more firmly on his shoulder.

"Lawns won't stay mowed either. Hi! Call that fork clean," Plop. The fork splashed into the dishpan.

"Aw now, Ted," wailed Bert, "I'm tired of washing that fork. It's stained with something."

"Egg, I guess. Rub it with salt. Doesn't it seem queer to have Ruth living in Mr. Kent's house, right next door to Weezy?"

"There they are now, wheeling their baby brothers around."

"Now, Bert! If you're going to wash these dishes please wash 'em! Look at that spoon! Mother would never O. K. that."

"Well, that's the gravy spoon. I'll put it to soak. And I'll put this pan to soak, and the skillet, and then I'll be about through."

"Here, I'll finish. Where's Hally?"

At that moment the small brother came in the kitchen door, and answered the question himself.

"Hally naughty boy! Hally wunned under the 'p'inkler," he announced cheerfully.

"Harry is an awful, bad, naughty boy," scolded Bert.

The three-year-old, dropped down on "all fours," and arched his back.

"I'm a kitty. Pat the nice kitty."

"Mother will 'pat' you all right," said Ted.

"Scat!" said Bert. "Don't you rub up against me. You've been out in the rain."

"I'm a bug. I'm a 'ittle toad frog."

"No, you're a naughty boy. You said so yourself."

"Why, you dear boys!" It was Mother's voice, as she came up on the porch steps. "What a nice surprise, to find the dishes washed."

"I'm a nice s'prise too," said Hally, "I'm a fish. I *has* to be aw wet."

"You have punished yourself," said Mother quietly. "David and his father are going to meet Auntie Bly, and they said they would let you sit on the front seat and help drive the big car."

"Hally good boy now. Hally wanta go in big choo-choobile."

"Could we go, Mother?" asked Bert.

"I think you can help more by staying here. They will be here in about an hour; but the moving van will get here first. We are going to have an early picnic supper, on the porch. All of us. You children can have tables on the lawn. Paper plates and napkins."

"And burn 'em in the 'cinerator?"

"Yes. Now I'll get Hally into dry clothes, while you, boy, count noses, and see if we have enough plates and napkins."

"Well, let's see," said Ted, beginning to write on the bottom of a cereal box. "Weezy, and her father and mother, and Aunt Lucy. That's three inside, and one out."

"And Uncle Richard."

"He had to go to Norwood. Then there's Ruth and David, and their father and mother. That's two in, and two out. And five Blys, two in, and three out. And five of us. Two in, and three out. Isn't this funny? Nine for the porch, and nine outdoors."

"How about the baby brothers?"

"Too little. They have to go to bed."

"My goodness! Seven boys and two girls."

"But some of the boys are just kids."

"Billy is seven, Dick is 'most five, and Marty is three, same as Hally."

"Eighteen of us. Come on, we must count the plates, and napkins."

Sounds of grief floated down the stairway.

"No, no, don't wanna wear 'at old fing."

Then Mother's quiet voice, "Here is your nightie."

A few minutes later, little footsteps came fretfully down, one step at a time, and Hally in his despised blue suit, marched out the side door, to the edge of a mud puddle. With an attempt at a hop, he landed in the middle of it.

"Now, he will have to put on his nightie, and go to bed," said Mother, coming down stairs.

"Oh, Mother," pleaded Bert, "Don't put him to bed, when everybody's coming. Poor little kid."

"But the laundry hasn't come, and that was his last clean suit."

"Well, but he'll have to have a bath first, and maybe by that time it will be here."

Ted brought in the "mud turtle," as he called him, and mother patiently scrubbed him again. But the laundry-man did not come.

"Why can't he wear his bathing suit?" asked Ted.

Bert flew to get the scarlet suit, and helped to put it on.

"Now, you're a lobster," said Ted.

"No. Don't wanna be a wobster. I'm a wed b'loon."

"All right," said Mother cheerfully. "You are a red balloon, and we'll tie you to the fence post, so you can't fly away."

Bert led his small brother to the gate, tied him with a piece of grocery string, and then dashed back to help with the tables. However, Hally soon grew tired of being a balloon.

"I is a nice 'ittle monkey, wiv a wed suit on," he murmured, as he broke the string. "I b'rong to a circus, at's what I b'rongs to."

No one saw him patter down the road, toward the wide country, and in no time, he had scampered out of sight, and was more than a mile from home.

A young farmer came out of a lane, riding an old horse. He good naturedly gave the small traveler a lift, keeping along the grassy edge, as the horse had lost a shoe.

Also, for the horse's sake, he cut across a field and through a piece of woods, coming into the road again, much further on.

In the meanwhile, Bert discovered that the "b'loon" was gone from the gate-post, and followed the little foot prints in the dust, till they suddenly stopped at the lane.

Look as he might, he could find no more, and much frightened, thinking of Gypsies, he ran on down the road, up hill and down; looking always for foot prints and calling distractedly, "Hally! Hally!"

"I wish I had a million soldiers," he thought. "We'd ride into that Gypsy camp, wherever it is, and I'd say 'you gimme back my little brother.' No, I wish I had a million airplanes, and I'd fly all around, and swoop down on those Gypsies. And I'd hang by my toes, from one of the wings, and I'd grab Hally."

But just then Bert heard a truck coming around the curve in the road, and had to step into the bushes, as the road was narrow.

The truck blared noisily by without seeing him, but through the dust, Bert saw two

things. The truck was filled with furniture, and Hally in his scarlet bathing suit, rode in state, beside the driver.

Bert sat down in the middle of a bunch of dusty buttercups, and pulled off his shoe. He took out a small pebble and threw it at a cow. The cow gave him a puzzled look, then doubling up her fore-legs, as cows do, she slid awkwardly down upon her close-cropped meadow, and gazed dreamily at the growing cornfields.

Bert practised lying down as the cow had done it, but found his legs were made the wrong way.

"Wish I had my bike; it's awfully far to walk home. Wish I had even one airplane. I'll wait till that blue jay flies off the limb, and then I'll start. Guess he's going to roost there. Well, I'm not, I'm going home. I'll wait till that car passes—Oh, Whoopee! David. Mr. Kent. Is there room for me?"

The car stopped and Bert gratefully squeezed in between Mr. Kent and David, after greeting the Blys. He had time to tell about Hally, before they overtook the truck.

"The little feller was sittin' in the middle of the road," said the driver. "He pointed this way for home, and when I got his name, I felt safe to bring him along, 'cause I heard the children talkin' about him this mornin' when we was packin' up."

"We'll drive ahead slowly," said Mr. Kent. "It is only three miles to the house."

Bert was expecting to be made a hero, when he reached home, or at least felt that there would be some excitement over Hally's safe return; but his mother (who had not missed them) said, "The laundry has come. Please take Hally upstairs and get him dressed. I am busy with the lemonade."

When the gay moment arrived for sitting down at the two picnic tables, it was found that Marty was sleepy and a little shy, so his father changed chairs with him.

Mr. Bly was a little fat jolly man, full of jokes, and always ready to tell a story. Almost as soon as he had taken Marty's place at the out-door table, strange things began to happen.

A voice came from under the table,

"Everybody's eating up the cookies. When do *I* eat?"

When the children ducked down to see who was there, the voice came again. It seemed to come from Ted's shoe "I want a cookie with a raisin on top. I'm hungry."

Billy Bly, who was seven, went on calmly eating his sandwich.

"My shoes can't talk. Daddy says they're speechless, 'cause the pup chewed the tongue out," he said.

But at that, a voice came from Billy's pocket.

"Let me out. I'm 'fraid of the dark. It's dark in this pocket."

Billy went on with his sandwich.

The others stared—then Louise gave a little jump, for the squeaky voice came from the top of her head, "How do I get out? I'm all tangled up in these yellow curls."

The voice flew about, from Ted's shoe to David's, from Ruth's hair to Dick's. From Weezy to Hally, then under the table again, or behind Bert's chair, making him turn sharply. It was very puzzling.

David, who usually thought things out for himself, felt sure that Billy's father was making the little voice jump from one to another, but he could not catch him at the right moment.

After supper, when all the plates and napkins had been burned, the children played games, with Aunt Lucy and Mr. Bly as playmates, while the grown-ups arranged the furniture.

Later, when the children were allowed to go into Ruth's old home, Ruth herself flew from one room to another in great excitement.

"Oh, Aunty Bly," she said. "It looks so different, and it looks so pretty. Here's your beautiful old corner cupboard, with the blue inside, and what's this? I can guess, I think."

"Yes, you're right," said the "Cookie Lady." "I got that yesterday, and it is full of cookies. So many children now; and when it comes to cookies, your Uncle Bill is a child, too."

"Uncle Bill" came in just then, gave his

merry little wife a squeeze, and walked through to the living room, followed by all the children. At the fireplace he paused, then stepped into it, and poked his head up the chimney.

"Santa Claus, are you up there?" he called.

"Yes, yes, I'm here," sounded a far away little voice.

"I thought I'd better let you know where to find us. We've just moved out from the city. Lots of good children around here. Don't forget 'em."

"Working on their things right now," answered the merry little voice from the top of the chimney.

"Oh, Uncle Billy," coaxed Ruth. "How do you do it?"

"How do I do what? What silly questions you ask," said Uncle Billy, trying to look very cross.

CHAPTER II

BIRD NEIGHBORS

A FEW days later, Ted and Bert made stilts, and stalked about the back yard, to the astonishment of the little ones. David made a pair for himself, and smaller ones for Ruth and Louise.

"If we get used to 'em so we can walk around without ever tumbling," said Bert, "We can keep on making 'em higher and higher, till we reach the blue dome of the sky 'all right."

"Then we *would* be 'Blue Domers.' "

"Look. There goes a robin, with a strawberry in his mouth."

"Looks as if it came from Weezy's garden."

"You couldn't possibly tell."

"I know where there's a robin's nest," said David.

"Let's take our stilts off, and go see it," said Ted. "Is it in your yard?"

"Yes. Come on. After we get over there, we'll put our stilts on again, and look right into the nest."

Off came the stilts, and the five hurried across the beautiful lawn of Weezy's home, and through the arched entrance to David's home, which was now Ruth's home, too.

"Ruth," said Bert, "aren't you glad you and your mother married David's father? Look what a home you've got. It's a beaut."

"My goodness. Here's Hally and Marty and Billy and Dick. We can't have them tagging along."

"You kids will have to go home and play in the sand pile."

"I'm not a kid," said Billy. "I'm too big to play with them."

"Well, it *is* hard for Billy," said Ted. "He's an in-between-er. I'll tell you Bill, you take the kids home, and play you are a policeman."

"Oh, yes, Billy," coaxed Ruth. "You be the policeman in charge of a play-ground.

And then some other day you can come with us."

"Honest Injun?"

"Yes. Honest Injun."

"Tomorrow?"

"Why,—Yes, I s'pose you can, if the rest don't care."

"Sure," said Ted. "You can play with us tomorrow."

"All right, then," said Billy happily, turning to the little boys with a fierce scowl."

"Come on now, young fellers," he growled. "You're all 'rested for speedin,' an' drivin' the wrong way, 'n everything. An' if you don't come right along, I'll get the control wagon after you."

The little group of four turned toward home. Billy felt a year older.

The "Blue Domers" stole softly under the trees, till David held up his hand.

"We're near it. Now we must be as still as Indians. Do as I do. Don't say a word, nor laugh, nor hardly breathe. Just take one look and go on *very* still."

Cautiously, one at a time, they drew near

the nest; lifting each stilt slowly, and using long "canes," as David called them, to keep from falling.

Not one of the five made a sound. At a safe distance from the nest, they unfastened their stilts and dropped on the grass.

"Ugliest things I ever saw," said Ruth.

"Why do their mouths have to be so big?" asked Weezy.

"So they can eat a big strawberry, or a nice fat worm."

Louise put her fingers in her ears, but Ruth laughed.

"Look, Weezy. What is Andrew doing with that little chicken-coop?"

They all ran over to the garden, where Andrew, was placing a small chicken-coop with a high peaked roof right in the middle of the strawberry bed. Then he started after the cat.

"Andrew," called Weezy. "What are you doing? And why are you trying to catch Big Boy?"

"It's the robins, Miss Louise," said Andrew, looking as if he had stolen the jam.

"They do be that pesterin'. If only now, they'd take the berries whole; but no, they must go mincin' along the rows, with a peck here, and a bite there. And I thought perhaps the cat——, you see I wouldn't mind if they'd take a whole berry, now and then. They're too picky an' choosy. I'm wearied with 'em."

"I'll get Big Boy," said Louise. "He'll come for me."

Very soon she had caught him and helped Andrew put him in the coop, where he lashed his long tail angrily, and tried to crawl through the slats.

"Let's get away now, and see what will happen," urged Ruth. "Let's go back where we were."

Soon a blue jay flew to the strawberry bed, saw Big Boy, and flew away with an angry squawk. Then a robin came and scolded from the edge of the first row. More robins came, and more jays. As the cries and squawks increased, the garden was one big noise. Big Boy seemed to enjoy it.

"Andrew," called Weezy, at the top of her voice. "It's terrible."

"Yes, Miss Louise," said Andrew. "It's not so good," and he tilted the chicken-coop. However, Big Boy would not come out; so Andrew picked up the chicken-coop, and walked off with it, leaving Big Boy exposed to the shrieking of the birds, and the laughter of the children.

"Let's see who can walk up to the house without falling," said Ruth, picking up her stilts. But only David succeeded. Walking up to the library window, he leaned in, and kissed his pretty step-mother on her pink cheek.

"I know a window I'm going to," shouted Bert. They followed him, well knowing what he had in mind. He stopped at the pantry window of the Blys. The pantry was large, and sure enough, there were fresh cookies, spread out on a little table to cool.

Bert began to meow. The others took it up, and soon there was a chorus of meows.

Plump little Mrs. Bly called them in, and handed out cookies most generously. Her

cheeks were pink, too, and there were dimples in them. Her eyes were a soft blue.

"Your face is very becoming to you," said Bert gallantly.

"No fair," laughed Ted. "Bert shouldn't have an extra cooky for saying that. All of us like your face and we're glad you moved here."

"I am glad, too, that we came to this town," said Mrs. Bly, as she smilingly passed the cookies again. "It seems to be such a happy, quiet place."

Loud howls from the sand pile, called the little group from cookies and compliments.

"Go 'way! Go 'way! Nassy bad fing," shrieked Marty.

"Nuffin' but a gobbler," sniffed Hally, as he calmly sat at the edge of the sand pile, sifting sand into his shoe.

But Dick and Marty, and even Billy, having lived in the city all their young lives, ran up on the porch for safety.

"Whose gobbler is it?" asked Mrs. Bly.

"Old Mr. Pratt's," said Bert, "I'll chase it."

He mounted his stilts and took a few warlike strides, then lost his balance, and sprawled into the poppy bed, just about spoiling them for the summer.

Ruth and Weezy could do nothing but jump up and down and squeal. Ted grabbed his stilts, but one of the blocks fell off. David alone, marched on steadily, gently shooing the big turkey toward the gate.

It was too bad that Penny, the little yellow cat, came around the corner at just that moment, with his mouth full of mouse; because Pep made a dash for him; loudly barking, and Penny scrambled up an apple tree, mouse and all. Then, since he could not reach the cat, Pep chased the turkey; but in the wrong direction.

It was all very lively, with plenty of noise. "Gobble, gobble" from the turkey, "Bow-wow" from the pup, squeals from the children, and Penny meowing in the apple tree.

Joe McGee came by on his roller skates, tossing afternoon papers into the door yards. The pup, the turkey, Joe and the newspapers met at the gate.

Just when everything was at its best, Uncle Richard drove up in his new car. His young voice rose cheerily above the din.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Bly. I hope you are enjoying our quiet little town."

"Oh, yes, I am, Dr. Stanton," she answered. "It's a wonderful place."

The boys and Ruth were helping Joe pick up the newspapers. Old Mr. Pratt rescued his turkey; while Weezy ran over to the car.

"Did you come for me, Uncle Richard? We've been having such fun. I can walk on stilts."

"I came for all of the Blue Domers. Joanna promised to make a cherry pie, but the birds are taking the cherries, now, before they are ripe. Let's see if any of you can think of something that will keep the birds out of one tree. We'll call it the pie tree. Hop in, all five of you, and I'll show you which one it is."

As it was only around the block, they soon reached the big house, which was Weezy's home, as well as Uncle Richard's. Going

softly down through the garden, they came to the row of cherry trees, alive with birds.

"Of course," said Uncle Richard, "there are plenty of cherries, but Joanna says this tree has the best. A prize to the one who has the best plan for keeping the birds out of this tree."

"First of all," said Ted, when Uncle Richard had left them, "let's think hard, and then tell our schemes."

For almost five minutes, everyone was quiet, then Bert said:

"I know. Pinwheels."

"Pinwheels?"

"Yes. Make a lot of 'em and pin 'em on the branches."

"Let's try it."

In no time at all, they made half a dozen pinwheels, stuck them on sticks, then tied the sticks to the branches. But there was no wind. The wheels did not turn.

"This one will go," said Bert, as he twisted up a bright green one, and fastened it carefully to a stick.

Shouting and laughing, they ran up and down the garden and across the lawn.

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"Why will it go? It's just like all the others," said Ruth.

"I'll show you," said Bert, and ran down the garden path with it. Very soon everyone had a pin wheel. Shouting and laughing, they ran up and down the garden and across the lawn.

Uncle Richard called from his study window:

"Everybody thinking hard?" then he disappeared.

The Blue Domers dropped down in the grass again. Robins and blue jays were quarreling in the "pie tree."

"We must do something," said Ted. "Shall I tell mine?"

"Go ahead."

"Well, I thought we could swing a big dinner bell up there, and have a long string."

"Yes, but somebody would have to be pulling the string all the time."

"We could take turns."

"All right. Let's try it." It took some time to fix the bell in the best position and arrange the string, so that it would not catch

in the branches; but finally it worked. Then Bert and David laughed.

"You first, Ted. You thought of it." Then they ran away and left him. Ted stuck to it for a while, but finally joined the others.

"Here's what I thought of," said David. "This old radio isn't good for much, and the static will be strong this hot day. Let's put it half way up the tree."

It took all three of the boys to fasten it in the fork. Ruth and Weezy were whispering together under the tree.

"Joanna will make it," said Weezy. "It won't take but a minute."

"That will work," said Ruth. "Better than dinner-bells or radios."

The boys came down, and the group drew away to watch the birds. But the radio was old and worn. After a few sputters and squawks, it settled down into a combination of static, and feeble snatches of song. An old blue jay lit in the top of the tree, cocked his head on one side, listening for a moment to the strange noises, then hopped over to a fine cherry, and began to enjoy himself.

Ruth and Weezy ran to the kitchen, then the boys saw them running down town. Back again with mysterious bundles, and after a very few minutes in the house, out-doors again, followed by Joanna, carrying two clothes poles.

Ruth called over her shoulders:

"Please, boys, go into the wood shed and don't peek till we get ours fixed. We'll call you."

"Can't we sit in the grass with our backs to the tree?"

"Oh, all right. It will only be a minute."

They heard Joanna's voice, "Careful now, Miss Louise, go easy. Here, I'll take it now."

"Oh, Joanna. Look. There's a bird inside."

"There he goes."

"All right, boys. Come and see it."

The girls had bought mosquito netting; Joanna had stitched the strips together, making a complete covering for the pie tree.

"That's great," said the boys, "you win."

"We ought to tie the corners," said David. "If the wind comes up, it might blow away."

"Good work," called Uncle Richard from his window. "I'll get the prize in the morning."

CHAPTER III

THE STORM

"I WONDER what the prize will be," said Louise.

"It will be nice," said Ruth. "Your Uncle Richard always thinks of such scrumptious things."

"Who thought of it?" asked Ted.

"Ruth did," said Weezy.

"But you bought the stuff, and Joanna made it."

"The pie tree looks funny. It looks like a parachute. Fooled the birds this time."

"If you had to be a bird," said Ted thoughtfully, "What kind of a bird would you be?"

"An eagle," said David quickly.

"Aw codfish," said Bert, "I was going to say that. All right then, I'll be a robin."

"Weezy, you look like a canary. A goldfinch."

"Ruth seems like a wren. She is so quick."

"Let's have bird names. It would be fun. What will you be Ted?"

"I'll be a—let me think a minute. I'd like to be an oriole."

"That's too long a name."

"Call me 'Ory.'"

"Yes. That will be good. Let's find some nests. David will have to find a high rock."

"Ted will have to hang from a limb."

Bert was lying flat on his back, gazing up at the blue dome of the sky. He sat up suddenly, and said:

"I guess I'll change. I'd rather be a buzzard."

"Why Bert Graham. That awful bird."

"They're not so terrible. Look how they can soar. If I could fly like that."

"Oh but Bert, they eat—they eat dead things."

"So do we. We had a dead chicken for dinner."

"Bert. For goodness sake, stop."

"Well, you wouldn't eat 'em alive would you?"

"Wait a minute," said David, and ran for the field glasses. "There now. See that buzzard on the fence? Take a good look at him, and see if you want to be one."

Bert looked long and steadily, and when he would have said, "No, I'll be a robin," the ugly creature rose and soared high above them. Beautiful he looked then. Wonderful how he could glide on, without movement of wings.

"I'll stick to it," said Bert. "I'm a buzzard. You can call 'Buzzy.' "

"All right then," said Ted, "I'll be the robin."

"Let's go nest hunting. Any kind of an empty nest."

"Each one alone. And put all the things we find in the old summer house. Will your father care, David?"

"I'm 'Eagle.' No, he won't care."

"Weezy and I would rather go together," said Ruth.

"All right. Jenny Wren and Goldfinch go together; and the Eagle, Robin and Buzzy go off, each one by himself."

The girls were the first to return. Ruth had a robin's nest, and Weezy had carefully removed a wren's nest from the grape arbor.

"The robins come back to their old nest, but I've watched; they like to tear out the old stuff and build new."

"Our wren always builds a new one."

"There's robin. How did he get an oriole's nest?"

"It was in a big elm that was blown down, over toward the river," said Ted.

Buzzy came back empty handed; but Eagle had three. "This one," he said, "is a ground bird's nest, I'll have to ask father what kind of bird. This is a barn swallow's, and here's a funny one. I found this one in the barn, too."

"Looks like a lump of mud, all dried up."

"Wait a minute." Eagle opened it cau-

tiously. As the clay sides fell apart, they saw that it was hollow. It was filled with dead flies and spiders, and down at the bottom were tiny eggs.

"Eagle. What is it?"

"It's a wasp's nest. When the eggs hatch out, here's a little pantry full of food."

"David, how do you know?"

"Father told me. We watch wasps sometimes. They pounce on flies, just the way cats pounce on mice."

"I found a hornet's nest," said Buzzy. "But it's occupied, so I didn't bring it."

"Let's go and see it."

"It's so hot."

"Joanna says there's going to be a thunderstorm."

"Oh, dear," sighed Weezy.

"I'll have to sleep with Aunt Lucy, if there is one."

"Why?"

" 'Cause she's so scared of 'em."

"There's Uncle Richard," shouted Buzzy. "What has he got?"

"It's the prize. It's two of them. Oh, aren't they beauties?"

Out from the large package came two very strong kites, one for Ruth, and one for Weezy.

"They are so heavy, I think the boys will have to help you fly them. When they are up in the air, I hardly think you girls can hold them, without help," said Uncle Richard. "Better try one at a time and watch the sky. It looks rather squally. Be sure to get them down in time if a storm comes up."

"Thank you. Thank you, Uncle Richard. We'll have such fun."

They chose Ruth's kite first, because she had thought of the mosquito netting; and after trying many times, Eagle and Robin got it well up in the air. It was bright scarlet.

"Looks like a tanager."

"Soars like a buzzard."

"How it pulls. Just as if it were alive," gasped Ruth. "I can hardly hold it. Come help me, Buzzy," as she noticed his eager face.

Bert came quickly, but in his eagerness to grasp the string, and Ruth's haste to give it to him, their fingers slipped, and neither one had it. Bert threw himself down on the last trailing end in the grass, and just saved it.

"Goodness, Buzzy. Where would it have gone?"

" 'Way around the world, I guess. The wind is strong up there."

"There goes Weezy's. Yellow like her hair. Hold tight, Goldfinch."

After holding the kite string with all her might, for a few minutes, Weezy asked David to take it.

"I b'lieve my hands aren't big enough or something. I'm afraid it will get away."

"Let's send a message," said David. "Here's some paper. Write a message, and send it up. Just write anything you think of."

Weezy thought a minute and wrote, "Is it cold up there, where you are?"

David took the pencil and poked a hole in the paper, put the end of the kite string

through it, and away flew the message. The kite was so high they could hardly see the scrap of paper.

Billy and his father came across the lawn. Billy was saying to his father:

"Tomorrow, Daddy, *Tomorrow,* they're going to let me play with them."

"That's great, Bill."

"Wish I could be a,—a venter——"

"Ventriloquist?"

"Yes. Then they would like me."

"Just play fair and be a good sport. They will like you. They are a good little bunch."

"Mr. Bly," called David. "Don't you want to send a message?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Bly very seriously, "I want to ask a question. It's something Marty asked me this morning, and I really could not answer him."

Mr. Bly's plump fingers grasped a short pencil, and he carefully printed the words:

"Do lions taste good when they're cooked?"

"Now watch that kite," he said.

But David watched Mr. Bly. He saw him

draw a long breath, saw that his mouth was open a little bit, on one side, but his lips did not move. A squeaky voice seemed to come from the kite.

"Why not cook one and try it."

"Sure enough," said Mr. Bly. "I'll have to go home and talk to Mother about it."

Dick was allowed to hold the yellow kite, feel the wonderful pull, hear the string singing in the wind, and watch the little messages fluttering up and down. But at last both kites were carefully drawn to the ground, and Ted, Bert and David ran off to see if they could find light wood for more kites, so that each one could have his own.

Dick waited happily in the grass with the girls. Hadn't they promised to make one for him, too?

Suddenly Ruth jumped up, "Oh, the poor robin. Look. His foot is caught in the string."

A long piece of string which the bird had been carrying was twisted around the end of a high spruce branch, and the other end was tangled about the robin's foot. Though he

fluttered and fought, he could not free himself.

"What shall we do?" cried Weezy. "I'll run and get the boys."

When she returned with David, Bert and Ted, the six of them tried to think how they could rescue the poor frightened bird.

"I'd climb the mulberry tree," said David, "and go out on that high branch that touches the spruce, but I'm too heavy."

"We are all too heavy," sighed Ted.

"I'm not," said Dick stoutly. "I'll go up."

"Oh, Dicky Bly, you mustn't," said Ruth anxiously, snatching his sleeve. But he pulled away from her and climbed the old mulberry. Up and up, until he reached the high branch that swung into the spruce tree. Then he realized that the branch would not hold him. He crawled out as far as he dared but he was still five feet from the robin.

Then Ted had a sudden thought. "Dick, do you think you could cut the spruce branch with the long tree trimmer?"

"I'll try."

Ted brought the trimmer quickly, and climbing half way up, stretched it up to Dick. It was clumsy and heavy.

"I need more hands," said Dick, after several trials. "And I must go higher or it won't cut."

"Oh, Dick," cried Ruth, "I'm afraid."

"Wait till Andrew gets home, or somebody."

"Where's Uncle Richard?"

But Dick had climbed higher.

They watched breathlessly while Dick wrapped his legs about the small branch and stretched the heavy trimmer out, until at last he had a fairly good hold upon the little spruce branch. He pulled with all his might but hadn't the strength to cut it.

"Twist it, Dicky," said Ted, "and keep opening and closing it. You'll get it, but when it goes drop the trimmer and grab the branch."

Dick fought hard with the tough little branch, and when it seemed as if he couldn't hold out another minute, down went the branch, the trimmer and Dicky, too, almost,

but he grabbed the limb and soon reached the ground safely.

"Good, old Dicky. You're a hero," said the boys.

Of course, Dick was allowed to hold the frightened robin gently in his hands, while David carefully cut the string.

"Just a minute, I'm not going to hurt you."

"It's a wonder his leg wasn't broken."

"There. Let him go."

Away flew the happy robin.

"He might have said 'thank you,'" said Bert.

"Look, there's a storm coming," cried Ted. "We must go home. Let's carry Dick on our shoulders, because he's a hero."

David was so vigorous, and growing so tall. He tucked Weezy under one arm, Ruth under the other and ran home with them. They reached the back porch, laughing and breathless. Ruth was thinking, "How strong he is, and how much I like him. I couldn't like him more, if he were my really truly brother, instead of my step-brother."

Weezy was not thinking of his strength, but of the way one lock of his fair hair curled down toward his blue eyes. "It is pretty that way," she thought.

"Louise. Louise."

"Yes, Aunt Lucy, I'm coming. Good-by, Jenny Wren. Good-by, Eagle."

Just as Aunt Lucy drew her inside there was a terrifying clap of thunder. The little old lady shook with fright. "I'm going to the hair closet," she said. "Come with me, dearie, we can't see the lightning there."

"Oh, Aunt Lucy, it's so stuffy. I'd rather watch it. David says if you sit still and keep out of a draught there isn't anything more you can do, so you might as well enjoy it."

"Please, dear, I'm so afraid of storms, and we are all alone in the house. Andrew has gone to meet Father and Mother, and Joanna went to the bakery. She took the baby with her. They'll have to stay there till the storm is over."

Weezy allowed herself to be drawn into the

dark closet and sank down with Aunt Lucy, upon a pile of porch cushions, and two or three bags of golf-sticks. Aunt Lucy put her fingers in her ears and pulled a coat before her eyes, but Weezy tried to see what she could through the crack in the door. How the wind blew. Was it a tornado? Was there ever such thunder? How the telephone and electric lights snapped and sputtered. At last came a tremendous crack, crash, bang! that shook the house. Even Weezy was frightened then.

"Are we struck, Aunt Lucy? Was it our house? Oh, I wish Father and Mother were home, and my dear little brother and Joanna and everybody."

They held each other close, in the dark closet. After that terrible crash, there were only a few rumbles, which sounded farther and farther away; the wind died down, and at last the two ventured out into the fresh air.

Weezy ran to the front door, which had blown open; saw her father and mother driving in; saw Joanna hurrying home with the

baby, and then saw David and Ruth splashing through the puddles.

"Wasn't it great?" cried Ruth. "We had to close all the doors and windows, and then we watched it, at the big north window, watched trees blowing over, and what do you s'pose? The lightning struck that 'normous tree way down near the fence, and tore it all to pieces."

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW HOUSE

David, Ruth and Weezy followed by some of the grown-ups, hurried down to see the ruined tree. Bert and Ted tumbled over the back fence to join them, and very soon Dick and his father came, too.

"Wasn't it an awful storm? Weezy," cried Bert, "did you see the tree get struck?"

"No," said Weezy. "I didn't see it, I,—I wasn't where I could see it."

"It was great old fireworks."

"This tree was one of the largest in this part of the state," said David's father. "I am sorry it had such a violent death, but it was hollow, it could not have stood much longer."

Mr. Bly was trotting about like a little

gnome, now and then measuring in certain places; then he said:

"Mr. Kent, I think a very attractive little domicile could be constructed," he paused, then went on rapily, but in French. The children could only stand with ears wide open, but not one of them could guess what was being said.

The two men seemed to agree very heartily, and were very much pleased with their own plans. At one point, Mr. Bly solemnly took a folding ruler from his pocket and measured David's height; a few minutes later he measured Bert's shoulders. It was very mysterious. Then they walked away, still talking earnestly.

"Wish we could talk French," grumbled Bert. "All we know is 'Hog Latin.' Dicky, do you know 'Hog Latin'?"

"I don't think so."

"Listen carefully, do-gerry you-gerry li-gerry ca-gerry?"

"I don't know what you said. Try another one."

"Do-gerry you-gerry li-gerry i-gerry cre-gerry?"

Dick looked puzzled.

Ruth asked, "Do-gerry you-gerry li-gerry pea-gerry nuggery buggery?"

"Oh," laughed Ted. "That's a good one, 'peagerry nuggery buggery.' Let's go quick to somebody's pantry. I'm so hungry."

"There goes our dinner bell."

"There goes our dinner gong."

"Yes, Mother, we're coming."

The children scattered, and for a time at least, no pantry was in danger.

Early next morning Ted was mowing the lawn, Bert was weeding the flower border, Ruth and Weezy were wheeling their baby brothers in the sunshine, and David was helping his father mount butterflies, when Dick made a flying call on each Blue Domer, and presented notes, reading:

"Meet me at three,
By the shattered tree.
'Three' means three minutes to ten."

The boys' notes had some added instructions.

"Bring a saw. Bring a hammer. Bring nails, and a small window, or a door step."

When the five reached the tree, at the appointed time, they found Mr. Bly and Dick, ready for work, while Mr. Kent sat comfortably in a lawn chair.

"I'm not the boss," he explained at once, "I am only a suggester. We are going to build a house."

First of all, a clothes-line was tied around the tree, and David being the tallest, was told to mark a line with white chalk. Then all the splintered pieces were sawed off leaving a level top.

Mr. Bly had brought an old Dutch door, no longer needed in the barn. Openings for a door and window were then cut and frames made. The inside of the hollow tree was carefully cleaned and the ground leveled.

"Now things get harder," said Mr. Kent. "I would suggest step ladders, because you are about to build the floor of the second story."

"A two-story house."

"Isn't it great?"

The boys brought step ladders, and in no time a firm floor was built.

"Better nail on some side braces so it won't tip when you put on the tower," said the suggester.

"Oh, hooray. I know what we're going to do. We're going to put the old summer-house on top; aren't we, Father?"

"Yes, if we can. I think I'd better help now."

The summer-house was light but clumsy. There was only one thing to do; take it apart, and then rebuild on the floor. It took some time, because all the nails had to be taken out carefully, and each piece numbered.

When, at last, the posts were in place, and the cross beams firmly nailed, it was easy to see that they would never be able to get the roof in place without more help.

"We shall need some cedar poles for a railing," said Mr. Kent. "If you boys know

where to find them, you could easily bring them home in the pony cart."

"I know," said David. "Old Mr. Fincham has lots of 'em."

"Better go at once then. Buy two dozen of even size, if you can. Then this evening, when all the fathers are home to help us, we can each take a pole, lift the roof up, and slip it over on the beams. Don't you think that will work out all right, Mr. Bly."

"Yes, it's about the only way to get it in place, the posts are not strong enough to drag it up sideways."

Before long the girls were left alone. "Isn't it going to be scrumptious, Weezy?" said Ruth. "Let's play something while the boys are gone."

"Let's go and get our little brothers, and play keeping house."

"All right. Let's."

But Weezy's baby brother was fast asleep.

"Well, then," said Ruth. "You get Hally and Marty, I'll take Billy and my little brother, then we'll each have two children."

"Let's get Dick, too, and we'll play rent-

ing apartments. Dick can be the 'for-rent man.' "

The game was soon going on vigorously.

"Now this 'partment," said Dick pompously, glancing at his tin wrist watch, "This one, I was 'specting to rent at three o'clock; but the lady hasn't come; so you can have it. I won't wait for her another minute."

"How much is it?" asked Weezy.

"How many baths? And when will it be ready?" asked Ruth.

"This one," said the 'for-rent man,' "you can move into right now. It has five baths."

"I'll take it," said Ruth.

"Wait a minute. How many children have you?"

"Two."

"Then I can't let you have it."

"Quick, Weezy, take my children," said Ruth. "Now, I'll take it."

"How many children have you?"

"Not one."

"All right. It's one hundred dollars a month."

"Very well," said Ruth airily.

"Ruth, you must ask him when he is going to decorate, and is there a garage."

"I'll decorate soon as the second floor is finished. Tomorrow, may be."

"Well," said Ruth. "I don't think I care to move in until it is all finished."

"If you pay me now, you can move right in, and have one month free."

"Very well. I'll write a check."

"Thank you, Madam. I hope you'll like it. This neighborhood is very *ex*cluded and *se*clusive."

"Now," said Ruth, "I'm moved in. Where's the mail box?"

"Right here; this bush."

Ruth pulled a large hickory leaf, and laid it on top of the bush. "Now Dicky, you be the postman, and take it to Weezy, to Mrs. Dill Pickle, I mean. Wait a minute." Ruth ran over and stood in front of Weezy.

"I'm Mrs. Dill Pickle's maid. Oh, here comes the postman. Have you any letters for Mrs. Dill Pickle?"

"One letter, and two bills," said the post-

man, who had picked two leaves from a gooseberry bush.

"I'll just see what this letter is about," said the maid.

"Dear Mrs. Dill Pickle:

"Will you please come and visit me in my new apartment, and *bring all your children?*

"Oleander Underwood."

Ruth dashed back to the apartment, just in time, for Mrs. Dill Pickle and all of the children were at the door almost immediately.

"Oh, how do you do. I am *so* glad to see you. What beautiful children you have. Come right in. How do you like my new apartment?"

"It is 'dorable. Hally, don't climb up there. The upstairs isn't finished. Marty, you mustn't climb out the window. What a char—r—ming view you have. Hally, that door isn't finished. You'll break it."

"I wanna g'wup 'stairs."

"I'm firsty."

"I wanna cookie. I wanna g'wup 'stairs."

"Marty! Marty! Oh, my goodness. How did he get up there? He'll fall. The railing isn't built."

"Here comes the 'for-rent man.' "

"I think, Madam, I shall have to ask you to move out," said Dicky sternly, after rescuing his small brother. "But I have another apartment which I think will suit you."

Ruth grabbed her baby brother. "Then *I'll* take this one. You will rent it, if there is only one child, won't you?"

"Yes, if you don't have any company. Now Mrs. Pickle, I'll show you the apartment." Dicky led the haughty lady and her three children, to a group of young oaks. "Here you are. This 'partment has a sun porch, an' a kitchenette, and pantryette. No. It has a fine big pantry."

"Is there a garage?"

"Yes, right here."

"How many baths?"

"Not one."

"Oh, I wouldn't like that."

"But your little boys will be pleased," said the 'for-rent man,' "I'm sure of it."

"I don't wanna be barfed," wailed Marty, not quite understanding the game.

"I *did* have a barf."

"Ruth, dear," called Mrs. Kent's sweet voice, from an upper window, "Please bring little brother in now. It is time for his nap."

Ruth took the baby to her mother, and returning, found that Hally and Marty had gone back to the sand pile, fearing baths. Before they could decide what to do next, they heard shouts from David, Ted and Bert, and ran over to help carry the poles.

That evening, a little group of mothers, with great Aunt Lucy, gathered on the Kent's grounds to watch the fathers and Dr. Stanton as they struggled with the summer-house roof.

It was a struggle. The pole idea did work out very well, and soon the roof was in place. But the sun had set, and the moon was rising, before the men would call it finished,

for they wanted to be very sure that the little house was strong.

When at last, they were ready to leave it, Mr. Kent said, "I hereby lay down one rule. *No* one is to climb on the roof at any time."

"Father," asked David, "Is that a glass rule or an iron one?"

"It's an iron *rule*. You must not break it. Tomorrow, you can have a good time finishing the railing. Make it something like this." Mr. Kent drew a pattern on the back of an envelope and gave it to David. "You can have a rope ladder. I'll show you how to make it."

It was a wonderful place to play. In the days that followed the little house was sometimes a nest, with Eagle, Buzzard and Oriole in the top. Ted had become an oriole, so that Dicky could be a robin. They felt Dicky deserved this, because he had saved the robin in the spruce tree.

Some days the little house was a castle, sometimes a boat, with Captain's walk above. Or a light house, as the evening grew dark enough, to show the gleam of flash-lights.

Sometimes it was an apartment building, with very noisy neighbors on the second floor, and two lively ladies on the first floor, who sang loudly, early and late, banging an accompaniment upon a toy piano. Sometimes the little house was a robber's den, or it was a school house. Always it was fun.

CHAPTER V

THE LITTLE GIRL FROM TEXAS

THERE came a morning when Aunt Lucy sent for the Blue Domers in great excitement.

"Such a letter I have just received," she said. "It is from an old friend of mine, Mrs. Sherwood. We used to play together. I'll read the important part.

" 'My granddaughter Aline is here to visit me. I had not seen her since she was a baby, as her mother returned to Texas after my son died. I did not expect Aline for another week, but she arrived three days ago. She does not seem happy. I cannot understand her at all. I think the poor child is lonely. She needs playmates; so I am writing to ask you to come and make me a visit, and bring that cheerful little band of Blue

Domers. Surely, your nephew, Dr. Stanton, will find time to drive you all to Woodside.'

"There," cried Aunt Lucy, her brown eyes shining like new marbles. "What do you think of that? Won't that be fun? I've asked all your mothers, I mean the mothers of all of you, and we are going day after to-morrow."

"Oh, Aunt Lucy! Isn't that gorgeous. Scrumptious! Galoptious! What shall we wear? Do we have to take a trunk? Poor Aline. We'll *just* make her be happy."

"The girls' clothes can go with mine in the car trunk, and you boys can use suit cases. Be sure to put in your Sunday best. Mrs. Sherwood is rather particular, and will expect you to be nicely dressed for dinner every evening."

"Goodness, Aunt Lucy, will Ted and David and I have to get evening clothes like Father's?"

"Oh, no, Bert, not that bad. Your blue coats with white trousers will be all right. I imagine you can play as usual, until about

five o'clock, and then you must not fail to be fresh and clean for dinner. You always do that at home you know."

"Ye-es," said Bert, and smiled at Ted.

The girls began at once to get their clothes together. First, they went to Ruth's house, and every dress was taken from its hanger and laid upon the bed.

"Shall I take that old green one? I never did like it." Back went the green one on the hanger. Ruth was very neat.

Her mother came in just then, with a box in her hand. In the box was a beautiful white dress.

"I was saving it for your birthday, but you may as well have it now. It will be nice for evening."

"Oh, Mother, thank you so much. It is lovely. I always feel dressed uppeder with a white dress on."

When Ruth's clothes were ready she and Weezy carried them over to Aunt Lucy, who was already beginning to put things in the trunk.

"I think this lovely new dress should stay in its box," said Aunt Lucy. "There's plenty of room in the trunk. Now we'll help Louise pick out what she will need. Aren't we having fun?"

In the meanwhile Bert and Ted were getting out their suit cases, and were putting in, first of all, their white trousers and blue coats.

Mother came in and said:

"Wait a minute. It is better, I think, to get everything together and then pack. Also why not put your best clothes in one suit case and your play clothes in the others?"

"Better put the good clothes in Ted's suit case," said Bert. "Mine is sort of—well, it's kind of bustificated."

David was in his big room on the third floor, looking out at the tree house. It would be fun to go, of course, but it was such good fun to stay at home. Hearing Ruth's voice he called to her from the head of the stairs:

"Are you and Weezy going to take your kites?"

"Oh, yes. I hadn't thought of it, but we can take them."

"Shall I take a hand ball? I don't suppose there's anything there to play with."

"Yes, let's take a good ball. Mother says Woodside is awfully big, eight hundred acres."

"We can certainly find something to do on eight hundred acres. Won't it be fun to walk all over it?"

The next day dragged slowly by, but early the following morning they set off happily in Dr. Stanton's big car. It was necessary to drive rather slowly, as the car was new, but that made it easier to see what was going on along the way.

In one small town there was a circus parade. In another there was a street fair.

Once they came upon some boys fishing from a bridge. A big turtle sat sunning himself upon a stone. It was all very peaceful; but around the curve of the road, a band

of Indians crept behind the bushes. Their cheeks and noses were painted bright red. They wore table covers, blankets, rugs, anything they had been able to sneak out with. The house was quite near the road. As the car strolled past a young girl was heard at the window:

"Augie, did you take my lip-stick?"

"Lip-stick. The idea. Poor foolish girl," said Aunt Lucy.

"If Augie is the one with the red blanket on," said Uncle Richard, "I rather think she took it."

"And made a more sensible use of it."

"Do you see the tall chimneys over there, almost hidden by the trees? That's Woodside. We'll soon be there now."

"Oh, I'm so excited. I'm jumping up and down inside," cried Weezy.

"We're all excited. Oh, look. Did you see the front door?"

"There's a little girl. She is gone now. Do you s'pose that was Aline?"

"Isn't this a beautiful entrance. All these

fine shrubs, then the willows and the big pool."

"Oh, I see a peacock."

"What a big, big house. My goodness, Aunt Lucy, how many rooms do you s'pose?"

"A great many. I've forgotten."

Mrs. Sherwood met them on the terrace and greeted them all very cordially, but she had an anxious look and very soon said:

"My granddaughter, Aline, has disappeared, that is, we have not seen her for an hour. She is sure to be somewhere in the house, because she does not like to be outside. I wonder if you boys and girls would enjoy a sort of hide and seek game? Go wherever you like, look in all the rooms and see if you can find her."

Off they started, much pleased with this beginning. After searching downstairs they ran up the beautiful front stairway and looked in some of the bed rooms.

"We'll get lost," said Weezy. "It is such

an awfully big house. We'll never find her this way."

"No. We'd better separate," agreed Ted. "You and Ruth go down that hall and David can take this, and Bert that, and I'll watch the stairway. She might slip downstairs and we wouldn't see her."

Bert walked down his hallway, thinking, "Aline must be a jolly girl. Making us play hide and seek first thing. It's lots of fun to poke around in this big place." At the end of the hall he stopped in amazement. In the last room of all, at the head of the back stairs, a little colored boy was tied to the bedpost.

"Oh, please get me loose," sobbed the prisoner.

Bert rushed in to untie the ropes, and then hesitated. Perhaps the boy had been up to some mischief. "Who tied you here?" he asked.

"*She* did."

"Are you,—are you being punished for something?"

"I ain't not. Dat's what I'm not."

"I just came a few minutes ago," said Bert, "I don't know anything about this place. I'll run down in the kitchen a minute."

Tearing down the back stairs, he opened a door into the most beautiful kitchen he had ever seen. So very large, with a floor of polished brick, a wonderful electric range, and such shining pots and pans. If only his mother could see it.

The cook was making patties at a large white table. She looked rather fierce, Bert thought, with that big rolling pin.

However, he came to the point at once.

"Did you tie that little colored boy to the bedpost?"

"Me?" snapped the cook. "Well ef dat don't beat my time. Is I goin' do dat when I needs him dis long time to shuck dem peas?"

Bert tore upstairs again, released the boy, then walked thoughtfully to the front windows. Hearing voices on the third floor, he went up and found Ted and David.

"We tried this door just now, and someone held the knob. Then we came back, opened the door, and there was no one here. It's a sort of sewing room, I guess. See the fine electric sewing machine and all the wardrobe trunk and boxes."

"And big drawers built into the walls."

"Look. What a view there is from this window," said David.

As the other boys joined him, a large branch from a maple tree was pressed against the screen, held for a moment and then dropped.

"It must be Aline, she must be at a window in the next room."

But running to that room it was found to be empty. The windows of each room looked out upon a sloping roof. It was very puzzling.

"Let's run downstairs and out on the lawn where we can see if anyone is on the roof," said David.

"Aline wouldn't dare. It's the third floor. She wouldn't dare climb around on

roofs up here," said Bert, as they ran down the hall.

"When they reached the stairway to the first floor they met one of the maids who said:

"Luncheon is served. Mrs. Sherwood and Miss Aline are waiting for you on the terrace."

Hurrying down, they met Aline. A little girl with very black eyes, a sharp little nose, and very straight black hair. Instantly the boys disliked her; especially as they noticed that Ruth and Weezy, who had been talking to her, looked almost frightened and certainly not happy.

Luncheon was served in a beautiful old paneled room with a most interesting antique corner-cupboard.

"Can you pick a lock?" was the first question Aline asked David, who sat next to her.

"I never tried it."

"Well, then, as soon as we can this afternoon, let's try to open that old cupboard. I want to get all that old glass on the table and the silver. All that stuff."

"Weezy and Ruth brought their kites. It would be more fun to fly them. They're beauties."

"Well, we can fly the kites first. That won't take long."

The little colored boy, whose name was Alexander, waited on the table solemnly and skillfully. As he was removing the soup plates, Aline stuck him with a pin.

"Let me have it a minute," said David smiling. Aline, thinking he meant to continue the sport, gave him the pin. But David put it under the lapel of his coat.

Aline scowled and turning to Ted, said:

"You weren't smart enough to find me. You weren't any of you smart enough."

"I don't know yet where you were hiding," said Ted pleasantly.

"I was on the roof. I've climbed all over. I've been way up by the big chimneys."

Mrs. Sherwood, Aunt Lucy and Uncle Richard were talking together earnestly, and did not hear what Aline was saying.

Alexander brought in the patties. They

were filled with creamed chicken and green peas. Bert enjoyed each delicious bite, but was thinking as he ate, "It was Aline who tied Alexander to the bedpost. How his fingers must have had to fly, to get those peas —them peas—no, goodness no, *those* peas ready."

After luncheon the boys put up the kites, Aline demanding that she be allowed to fly the yellow one. "It will hurt your fingers," said Weezy. "It pulls so hard."

"Give it to me. Give it to me," cried Aline, stamping her foot.

"She may as well find out," thought Bert, and gave her the string. Even sooner than he expected, the kite gave a sudden jerk, and cut her finger. Aline ran screaming to her grandmother, but returned at once, saying:

"You are to play whatever I want to play, because you hurt my hand on your old kite."

"What do you want to play?"

"Hide and seek; and I'll be 'It,' and you are to hide behind trees, and not come out till I count two hundred."

Good-naturedly, the children ran to hide, first tying the kites to a small tree. When the last child disappeared, Aline sprang to the yellow kite, gnawed the string with her sharp little teeth, and Weezy's beautiful kite sailed away forever.

"Two hundred," shouted Aline.

"Oh, my kite," cried Weezy, when she came up to the goal. "Where is my lovely kite?"

"The string broke," said Aline.

David untied Ruth's kite, wound the string and carried the kite to his room.

"It won't be safe here," said Bert, who had followed him, better put it in the car, and we'll ask Uncle Richard on the quiet to take it home where it will be safe. Isn't Aline an awful girl."

Aunt Lucy called Ted, so for a time the three girls were left alone.

Aline turned to Louise.

"You're not so pretty as you think you are."

"Why Aline. I don't think about such things."

"Yes you do. And you're not pretty. You just look like a doll."

"What's the matter with you?" asked Ruth severely. "Don't you like it, that we came to see you?"

"Oh, you are all right," said Aline carelessly, "but I don't like this silly little thing. Don't you dare tell that you saw me climbing down the lattice, Louise, or I'll do something dreadful to you. I'll lock you up and I'll get my old nurse to 'conjure' you. She'll do anything I tell her to."

"Louise," called Aunt Lucy, "Come say good-by to Uncle Richard. He is going now."

Weezy and Ruth ran across the lawn, Aline following slowly.

"Don't get homesick, dear," whispered Uncle Richard as Weezy threw her arms around his neck. "I'll come for you when Aunt Lucy sends word to me. Good-by all. I hope you will have a merry time."

When he had gone, Aline turned to the boys. "You can go and do whatever you like. We girls are going to have some fun upstairs."

Ruth and Weezy, determined to be polite, followed her most unwillingly. Aline led them to the sewing room. One drawer after another she pulled out, and one trunk after another she tried to open. In one drawer she found some old fashioned dresses, some hats and bonnets gay with feathers.

Once she left the girls for a few minutes, ran down to Mrs. Sherwood's room, dashing back again, her arms filled with laces, embroidered scarfs, and a necklace or two. These she dropped into one of the drawers.

"Now watch me. I'm making a pudding. See me stir up?" With both hands, and her lean, sharp elbows as well, she lifted and stirred the beautiful contents of the drawer.

Ruth and Weezy ran downstairs and out on the lawn.

When it was time to dress for dinner, Ruth's pretty new dress could not be found.

"Don't tell your dear Aunt Lucy," she whispered to Weezy, "I'll wear my blue one. I s'pose Aline has been in here and hid it."

"Oh Ruth, your beautiful new dress. There isn't time to look. I'm glad her room doesn't open into Aunt Lucy's, as our rooms do."

Aline was almost late to dinner, but when she appeared, she was wearing Ruth's dress. Dinner was served in the large formal dining room. Alexander did not appear, and as Aline seemed really to be a little afraid of the butler, there was no mishap except the upsetting of Weezy's water glass.

"Never mind, dear," said Mrs. Sherwood kindly. "I'm sure you did not do it intentionally."

When at last, the day was over, when Aunt Lucy, Ruth and Weezy had gone up to their rooms and were ready for bed, Weezy ran across to Aunt Lucy's room, and into Ruth's for a few last words.

"Did you see what she did, Ruth, there at the table? She leaned over and upset my

water glass. On purpose. And her grandmother thinks I was careless."

"I know. I saw her do it."

"I'd rather be home, but we mustn't say anything. Aunt Lucy would be so unhappy."

CHAPTER VI

ANOTHER GUEST

For the next two days, Aline refused to play out-doors. Then she announced on the morning of the third, that they would play croquet. But when everything had been made ready for the old fashioned game, she said, "No, we'll play hide and seek, and you can hide anywhere. David must be 'It.' "

It was anything for peace, by this time. The boys had discovered that if they crossed her, she took revenge on Ruth and Weezy.

So Hide and Seek it was; but when Weezy would have scampered behind a big willow tree, so happy to be out-doors again, with the good grass under her feet, Aline suddenly took her hand and saying, "Come quick. I know a fine hiding place," rushing

her back of the house, through the garden, and down some old stone steps to an unused spring house.

"Get in, quick. They'll never find you there," cried Aline, pushing poor little Weezy through the door. A heavy rusty hook was thrust into its staple, and then for Weezy, there was nothing but dampness, cobwebs and dark silence.

Running back quickly to join in the game, Aline was puzzled for a moment, to see that the others had gone up to the house. A large car had just driven up to the door. Aline took one look, then dashed in the side door and disappeared.

An old gentleman stepped from the car, then turned and gave his hand to a dear little girl, with soft brown curls, and the sweetest of voices.

"Is this my dear grandmother? I am Aline."

"Aline? Why,—what—?"

"I am Mr. Courtney, Paula Huntington's

guardian. If you are Mrs. Sherwood, Madam, then this is your granddaughter."

"But who is the Aline who is here? I cannot understand. Oh, I hope this is indeed my dear grandchild. I had not seen her since she was a baby, and this child came——."

"It is Paula. She lives near your granddaughter. When she heard you had invited Aline to come this week, she came on ahead, all by herself, following the instructions you had sent Aline, I presume. No doubt she thought it a clever jest."

About fifteen minutes later, Paula herself appeared, followed by Alexander carrying her bags. "Well, I'm ready to go," she said pertly. "I've had enough of this stupid place."

Without one word of goodbye to anyone, or courteous thanks for her visit, Paula popped into the car, and Mr. Courtney, fearing she might try to start it, joined her as soon as possible.

As the car started down the drive, Bert ran after it.

"Where is Weezy? Quick tell me where she is."

"She's where you won't find her in a hurry. Perhaps, never."

In the meanwhile, Mrs. Sherwood and Aunt Lucy had taken the real Aline upstairs, to make her comfortable after her journey. Mrs. Sherwood, with loving hands, brushed the brown curls and helped select a comfortable play dress and sport shoes.

Aunt Lucy walked the floor, saying, "That terrible child. How did she dare. What a week you had with her."

"It was a nightmare. I couldn't believe it possible that she was my granddaughter. But you, little Aline, have only grown sweeter."

Downstairs, Ruth and the boys were talking hurriedly. "We mustn't scare Aunt Lucy and worry poor Mrs. Sherwood, she's had enough, but we must find Weezy. There

wasn't time for that dreadful Paula to take her very far."

"She must be out-doors, we'll each take a different way." On and on, in wider and wider circles they searched the grounds; calling softly, "Weezy, Weezy." But only Ted passed the old spring house, buried in vines and elder bushes. He called in low tones, but Weezy's tired little voice did not penetrate the heavy stone walls. She had cried and called so long.

They returned at last to the house. Aunt Lucy and Mrs. Sherwood, with her arm about Aline, were standing on the terrace.

"Are you playing a game?"

"We had been playing hide and seek, Mrs. Sherwood, but Louise found too good a place. We can't find her."

"Aline will like to help you, I am sure."

"Oh, yes," said Aline happily. Off they went again, calling now at the top of their voices.

"Weezy, Weezy. Where are you? We're

not playing any more. Aline is gone. The real Aline is here."

But they could not find her. When they reached the house, Ruth was crying, and the boys had anxious faces.

"Perhaps you had better look in the house," said Mrs. Sherwood. "Ask one of the maids to help you and Alexander."

Bert ran to the kitchen.

"That bad girl is gone, and the real one is here. My cousin is lost, and Mrs. Sherwood says Alexander is to help us find her."

Alexander bent low over the potatoes he was peeling.

"Drop the taters, Alec," said the cook, "an' go he'p the chilluns. Lawsy, I's glad dat little imp done gone. She come in yere, an' she squinch up her eye-balls, an' she keep me dat errytated, I kain't cook. Alec, you go now."

But Alexander hung his head.

"You Alexander, ef you don' go; I beat yo.' I mek yo' fergit what you lives at."

But the little boy kept on peeling potatoes vigorously, his head bent low over the pan.

"Alec, what ail you? Is you got a pain in your mis'ry?"

"No," said Alexander faintly, fearing a dark dose of medicine from Liza's big bottle. "I isn't got no pain. I's jess puny."

"Never mind," said Bert, "perhaps he'll come after a while. I'll hurry along."

Two maids joined in the search. Every room, every closet, every box and trunk that could possibly hold poor Weezy, was fairly turned inside out, but no dear little golden haired girl did they find. They searched every corner of the big barn, the garage, and chauffeur's quarters.

Then they went to the pool. If Paula had enjoyed being out of doors, she would certainly have discovered this wonderful sheet of water. But although the pool was very large, it was entirely enclosed in huge green shrubs and trees.

At one side, was a pretty white bath house almost overgrown with climbing roses.

Ruth stood looking at the pool. "Is it very deep?" she asked.

"Oh, no, Miss, not more than eight feet."

"Eight feet. Weezy could have drowned in four," thought Ruth.

"There's a boat, I'll have one of the men row about, but Mike was workin' here on the shrubbery—Mike, did you see any children 'round the pool this mornin'?"

"There's been no-one here but me, since tin o'clock."

"It was after ten before we began to play hide and seek," said Bert, "because when I was running away to hide, I just happened to be saying to myself, 'a dillar, a dollar, a ten-o'clock scholar,' and then I looked at my wrist watch, and it was half past ten."

"There's a big woods," said the maid, "perhaps she's lost in there. Come help us, Mike, Mrs. Sherwood says everybody is to

help." So Mike joined them, also Gordon, the stable boy, who had charge of the saddle horses. Luncheon was forgotten. Who could think of food, with Weezy lost in the woods.

In the kitchen, Liza was making gingerbread. The sweet spicy odors filled the big room. Out of the corner of her eye, she watched Alexander, who sat drooping in his chair. Usually when there was nothing for him to do, he would get out his harmonica and play some sprightly tunes, but now he sat with idle hands, gloomy and forlorn.

"Alec, I ain't goin' ax you many times mo'. Is you sick, or is you ain't?"

"I ain't sick," sighed the boy. "Deed an' double deed, I ain't sick."

"Den you tell me right quick what the matter is. Does you known where dat imp done hid Miss Louise?"

"Oh, Aunt Liza, don' ax me."

"Listen boy. What for you so scared? Dat bad girl, she done gone. You know dat.

You done carry out her bags youse'f. She ain' nevah come back no mo.' Now, you tell me. I gib you nice sugah cake."

"Oh, I dassen't. I dassen't."

"Ef you tell me, I gib you nice sugah cake. You don't tell me, I gib you a lickin'. Now, you tell which all you want. I count seben."

Alexander squirmed in the chair.

"One. Two. Free. Fo'—I means what I says." Aunt Liza looked at the gingerbread, rising in the oven. "Five—Six."—She made an excuse for going to the pantry at the other end of the big kitchen. But when she came back, she reached down behind the radiator, and drew out a switch.

"Now, I gwine gib you what is your own choose."

"Oh, Aunt Liza, no, no, don't. Ef I tells you, she gwine conjer me!"

"Who conjer you? Dat little imp what's gone?"

Aunt Liza laid the switch on the table, and

with her hands upon her hips, gazed at her small nephew.

"Honey," she said solemnly, "you listen what I tells you. Dere ain't no hoo doo. Dere ain't no conjer. Not anywhere dere ain't; an' I can't make it any ainter."

"Oh, deir Aunt Liza, come quick, I'll show you where she's at."

Together they ran through the garden, down the old stone steps, and brushing aside the heavy vines, opened the moss covered door.

There lay Weezy upon the cold stones. How still it was. Alexander could hear his heart thumping. The whole world seemed to him to stand still for a moment, then a little phoebe called sadly from the nearest willow, and Aunt Liza went down into the old spring house.

Weezy was fast asleep. Aunt Liza carried her out into the sunshine. "Run quick, Alec, tell 'em all, dis little lady ain't losted no mo'. Run."

Away flew Alexander, Weezy opened her eyes, looked into Liza's kind face, with some surprise, and then asked, "Where is she? Where's Aline?"

"Dat little varmint. She gone far. You ain't goin' see her nevah. She was de wrong one. We got de right one now. You wan' me to tote you up to de house?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I'm all right, just cold; but I don't believe I can run."

Rushing to meet them, came Ruth, Aline and the boys, with Aunt Lucy behind them, running almost as fast. She had not forgotten how to run, although she was past sixty.

"Dear child," she cried, "are you hurt? Are you all right?"

"Oh, yes, I feel fine. I'm so glad to be out of that dreadful place. I was so scared. It was so dark and oh so cold; and I didn't know what was in there. Something ran over my foot. Is Aline really gone?"

"She wasn't Aline, she was Paula. Here's the real Aline."

"Oh, goody, goody," cried Weezy, jumping up and down like her old merry self, and as by that time, as she felt able to run, they all raced up to the house, which seemed now to smile upon their happy faces.

CHAPTER VII

DANCING BEFORE THE QUEEN

THE next day was piping hot, but none of the youngsters minded that, for Mrs. Sherwood had told Mike to get out the little row boat, the wonderful chute, and all the gaily colored rubber seabeasts which added so much to the joy of the pool.

Six happy swimmers were soon romping in the water. Sliding down the chute, or climbing upon the big rubber animals, only to fall off again most unexpectedly.

"I'm a whale," shouted Bert, as he mounted a bright green beast; but down he went. The beast would not hold him.

"I'm a sea-horse," cried Ted, grasping a gaudy yellow animal and trying to climb upon its rolling back, but down to the bottom went Ted; bobbing up quickly to try again.

One pleasant blue creature with popping eyes, and a large smile, seemed more gentle. Ruth proudly sat astride, and announced, "I'm a thingamajig. I eat everything. I eat boats, and chutes, and bath houses, and I eat boys and girls. Look out. When I open my mouth like this——."

Ruth had not expected to roll into the water at that moment. She came up laughing and sputtering.

Aline was a beautiful diver. The others stopped their fun to watch her.

"How did you ever learn?" sighed Weezy. "It must be more fun than anything else."

"I began when I was five," laughed Aline. "We lived so near the Gulf of Mexico, and I began before I was afraid."

"I'm afraid," said Ruth. "How *do* you do it?"

"Just like this," said Aline, flashing gracefully into the pool. "Or like this. Or sometimes this way." She laughed merrily. "Do try it. It's such fun."

"Here's the way Ruth will dive," said

Bert, grabbing his nose, and dropping awkwardly sideways into the water. "Or like this." Here he doubled up into a ball, and rolled off the diving board.

"Buzzy," stormed Ruth. "Some day I'm going to learn how to do it, and you'll try and try, and you'll never dive such good ones as I will."

"Why do you call him Buzzy?" asked Aline.

"We took bird names just for fun. Bert is Buzzard, David is Eagle, Ted is Oriole, Weezy is Goldfinch, and I am Jenny Wren."

"What could I be?"

"Let's see, brown eyes, brown hair, and some cute little freckles; how would you like to be a Veery?"

"I'd like it."

"All right, you are Veery, but then you'll have to sing."

"I like to sing. Shall I do it now?" Sitting on the spring-board, Aline sang one sweet old Southern song after another, many of them songs the others had never heard.

Alexander, to his great joy, was allowed to blow the whistle for luncheon. Reluctantly, the swimmers left the water, dressed, and returned to the house, but one o'clock found them on the shady east lawn.

"What shall we play?"

"Let's each think of three things."

"Or else let Ted say first. No, let's draw cuts."

The choice fell to Bert. "Let's play hide and sneak."

"How do you play it?" asked Veery.

"We made it up. Bert had to be 'It,' because he chose the game. He counts a hundred and then he looks. Sometimes we are all sitting in the grass and haven't hid at all. Then he feels foolish. All that counting for nothing. Then sometimes we hide, and he sneaks off and we have to find him."

"All right. Let's play it." After a round or two of this, it came Weezy's turn to choose.

"Let's play 'Oak Tree.' We made that up too. Ted is oak, David is elm, Ruth is

hickory and you, Aline, are wild cherry. Bert is rubber." Bert groaned.

"There is no rubber tree, here, so you see Bert isn't safe anywhere."

"Then we play this way, I'm 'It' and I try to tag somebody, but if I tag Ted when his hand is on an oak tree, then I don't get him, but if he forgets and touches another tree, or does it to fool me, and doesn't get his hand off quick enough, then he is 'It.' "

It was a jolly game, but the day was warm for such constant running, so before long, they counted out again.

"Now, Veery, it's your turn. Choose something that you play in Texas."

"Then let's play, 'Dance before the Queen.' First we choose a queen, and dress her very beautifully, with a crown and everything, and then we go up one at a time, or sometimes two, and do stunts. We sing, or we dance, or play a banjo; the boys stand on their heads, or do cart-wheels, or most anything. Sometimes we play keeping store."

"Oh, it sounds like lots of fun."

"Let the boys choose the queen; while we get the crown ready and the robes."

The girls ran to the cool east room where the two old friends were happily talking over old times. Ruth thought, "How do they stand it to sit here all day, just doing nothing. When I grow up, I shall keep right on playing."

"Grandmother," cried Aline eagerly. "May we have some old dresses and hats, and an old lace curtain? We'll be very careful. We want to play 'Keeping Store,' and 'Dance before the Queen.' "

"Certainly dear. You will find plenty of old things in the sewing room drawers and boxes. Take anything you like."

The girls filled their arms with old dresses, hats, slippers, anything that struck their fancy, not forgetting lace curtains for the Queen. When they returned to the boys, David said, "We haven't chosen the Queen yet."

"Then let's play 'Keeping Store' first."

The boys rigged up a counter, hung hats and dresses on the branches; displayed fancy slippers and marvelous hats on the counter, and announced the opening of a new store. Aline, Ruth, and Weezy in long trailing dresses, gazed haughtily at the display of hats upon the counter.

Ruth picked up one that fairly pranced with feathers, held in place by a large glittering buckle, and further ornamented with enormous bows of plum colored velvet.

"This hat," she drawled, "is *rather* nice, but it is so plain. I need quite a dressy hat."

"Madam," said Bert, with much dignity, "would you care to try it on? Perhaps you will find it is heavy enough, as it is."

Ruth allowed him to place the very large hat on her head, but it rested upon her nose, covering her eyes completely.

"Ah," said Weezy, "Isn't this Mrs. Oleander Underwood? How you have changed!"

Aline was trying on a coat, "I think it is too loose," she said.

"Just a minute, Madam," said Ted, in his best manner. He hastily gathered together great folds of the coat, in the back; holding it firmly about Aline's slender little figure.

"There, you see, it only needs to be taken up slightly, in the back."

And so the game went on. But when they were ready to play "Dance before the Queen," Mrs. Sherwood said to Aunt Lucy, "Come, let's watch this. I have seen the children in Texas playing it, and it is a very pretty game."

They decided to play near the pool. Chairs were placed for the audience of two, where they would get a reflection of the events in the water.

A throne was quickly made, by using a high-backed chair, then while the girls gathered roses for the crown, the boys walked away to decide who should be queen.

"Of course," said David, "Weezy is the prettiest girl in the world, but Ruth is pretty too, and so is Aline, and we are Aline's company, so I suppose,——"

"Ruth doesn't look like a queen. She's too full of fun."

Just then Aline called, "Please, please, choose Weezy. The crown just fits her head."

So Weezy sat upon the throne, with roses on her yellow hair, beautiful lace falling over her shoulders, and trailing down over her queenly robes. Her sceptre was a golden dandelion, tied to a willow wand.

"Grandmother," said Aline, "we'll have to have music. Couldn't Alexander come and play his harmonica?"

"Yes, dear. That is a good idea."

"I'll get him," said Bert.

A few minutes later, a very happy Alexander, set upon an empty nail keg, playing sweet Southern songs, while Ruth and Aline, in costumes, made of soft old curtains, hastily pinned together, danced before the Queen.

When the dance was over, Aline said, "Now we drop down on one knee, like this,

Ruth and Aline, in costumes, made of soft old curtains, danced before the Queen.

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and you touch our heads with the sceptre. That shows you are pleased."

The audience applauded warmly. "That was very, very beautiful, but O, Aline, *where did you get the lace that the Queen is wearing?*"

"In one of the big drawers, in the sewing room, Grandmother."

"That is very strange. How could it get there? Don't take it off Louise, but be careful. It is very valuable lace. I am saving it for Aline to wear on her wedding day."

The next event was stunts by the three boys. Running races, three-legged races, a race between Ted in the row boat, and David in the water.

Then Aline did some fancy diving. Ruth recited two poems, and David pleased everyone by playing his flute. He stood with his eyes on the beautiful little queen, and felt he was playing for her alone.

Mrs. Sherwood was so pleased with the entire performance, she sent to the house for her camera, to take some snap-shots.

After taking several, she asked the queen to stand at the edge of the pool, while David, from the end of the diving board got a picture of her, reflected clearly in the pool. As she stood there quietly, Mac, the big collie, delighted at escaping from the kennels, broke through the shrubbery and dashing against Weezy, pushed her into the pool.

Of course, David helped her quickly, as her heavy robes were tangled about her feet. But O, the beautiful lace. It was wet through and through.

"Never mind, children," said Mrs. Sherwood, "I am sure it isn't hurt one bit. We'll spread it out on the lawn to dry, Louise can dry her hair at the same time, and you can play some quieter game. But don't let anything happen to the lace."

Weezy hurried into dry clothes, and helped Aline and Ruth to spread the lace on the grass, gently pulling each little point in place. Then while Aline, Ruth and the boys carried hats and dresses up to the sewing

room, Weezy was left to guard the lace, and dry her hair.

She was wide awake every single minute, and heard no footsteps behind her, but when she shook her curls out of her eyes, and turned around, the lace was gone.

She started up with a scream, and the others came running.

"The lace! The lace! It's gone! There was no one here. How could it happen? There wasn't a sound."

"Alexander took Mac to the kennels again. I saw him," said Bert.

"We've only been gone about two minutes."

"Oh, Aline. What will your dear grandmother say?"

"We must look and look, and then if we can't find it, we must tell her right away."

They searched everywhere. It was very mysterious. Here was this immense quiet lawn, Weezy was sitting alone with the lace, in the sunshine. No one apparently had

been near the place, and the others had been gone so short a time. They had to give up and go to Aline's grandmother with the sorry news.

Louise was crying, Ruth and the boys were anxious, as Aline bravely told the story.

"It seems impossible," said Mrs. Sherwood. "Oh, I am sorry. I wanted you to wear the lace on your wedding day."

"Then it will be all right. I'll just never get married," said Aline.

Her grandmother smiled. "Don't cry, Louise. We must all be very thankful that the thief did not take you too."

When Liza heard the news, she said, "Ef I could jess git my hands on dat robber, nuffin done satchify me mo'."

Weezy could not be comforted. "I guess it would have been better if I hadn't come at all." She wailed, "I lost my kite, and got locked in the spring house, and pushed in the water, and now this is the worst of all."

And so the merry house party ended

rather sadly, with Uncle Richard driving them home in the rain, a few days later, and Weezy crying on Aunt Lucy's shoulder almost all the way.

CHAPTER VIII

HOME AGAIN

Uncle Richard watched his small niece with some anxiety. "You must really cheer up, dear, and forget about the lace. There is nothing we can do, and perhaps some day it will be found. Mrs. Sherwood offered a big reward you know."

"I'll try, Uncle Richard. Really I will, but if I had watched every single minute, the thief couldn't have sneaked away with it."

"Perhaps you couldn't have done anything if you had seen him. He must have been very bold, and no doubt, you were in danger yourself. I have thought of something jolly. I need a vacation, how would you Blue Domers like to camp out on the river, not far from our picnic stone."

"Oh, Uncle Richard. That would be scrumptious. When could we go?"

"In two or three days. You run tell the others, all the fathers and mothers say it will be O. K."

Weezy flew next door to tell Ruth and David, and then the three ran to find Bert and Ted. Shouts and squeals, summersaults, cartwheels and standing on heads, faintly expressed their joy.

"Nothing but old clothes for two weeks. Hooray!" shouted Bert.

"Uncle Richard says we're going to camp in an old log house, that has an upstairs and a downstairs."

"Oh, jolly!"

"And a big fireplace."

"We'll play games around the fire in the evening."

"Let's get ready."

When the morning arrived, Ted leaped out of bed, and shook his brother. "Come on, old sleepy-head. Time to get up. Uncle

Richard will be here early. There he is now. Hurry."

"Ted, I feel funny. My head aches and I'm so hot."

"Headache. My goodness, Bert. You look funny. Uncle Richard, come see what's the matter with Bert."

"Chicken-pox," said Uncle Richard promptly. "Too bad."

"Bert, what in the world did you get that for? Now you can't go. Gee, I'm sorry. P'raps you'll get well real quick and come afterward. Do you care if I take your fishing rod?"

"Wait a minute, Ted. Come here to the window. I thought so. Pop right into bed. You've got it too."

Mrs. Graham came in just then. Her brother smiled, "I am sorry to announce that these boys of yours have the chicken-pox."

"Richard, isn't that too bad. But it is better than if they had come down with it in camp."

"Much better. However, we'll have to put off the trip, and a quarantine card goes on the door."

"Dear, dear. That's too bad. How about Hally?"

"Keep him downstairs."

"He hasn't been as lively as usual, and I did notice some spots."

"Perhaps, he had it first."

Ruth, Weezy and David came under the window, when they heard the news. Both boys felt too miserable to answer their calls, and the day moved quietly by.

After another day, they were clamoring to get up. On the third day Uncle Richard consented, but warned them. "You must not stir out of your own yard, nor let any of the children come near you. Remember the red card is on the door."

The first week dragged slowly by; though they did spend one happy day trying to build a kite like Weezy's. They tried to read, but they felt too lively. They got some amusement out of chasing robins off the

lawn. "Don't you see the chicken-pox sign?" they shouted. And of course, it was always fun to curry their dear pony, Zed, and teach him new tricks. The second week, there were four rainy days. Mother was almost distracted.

On Wednesday, of the third week, Ruth and David came to the fence. They both had chicken-pox some years before. "Only four more days, then we can go."

"Isn't that great. Won't it be fine to get into the woods again?"

"Where's Weezy?"

"She didn't feel like coming over. Thinking about that old lace, I s'pose."

"Aunt Lucy hunted up some old bed-ticks,——"

"What's a bed-tick? Anything like a wood-tick?"

"No. It's a sort of a big bag, the size of a mattress, and you fill 'em with straw. The farmers will give us some."

The next day it rained. Also the next. Saturday morning was sunny and pleasant.

Again Ruth and David met the boys at the fence.

"Only two more days. Only two more." Chanted Bert and Ted, and then, "What's the matter?"

Ruth and David looked at them gloomily.

"Weezy's got the chicken-pox."

"Oh, codfish!"

"And spinach!"

"Three weeks more!"

"We can't go at all. It will be too late."

Despair settled heavily upon them.

"She's got fever, and she's out of her head. She talks about the lace, and Dr. Stanton says she's the sickest one he's had."

"My goodness!"

There were three or four days of real anxiety, for Weezy was very ill. Then she grew better rapidly, she was able to sit up. She was out of bed. Then came a pleasant surprise. Uncle Richard said one morning, "I have decided to take all of you chickens to the camp. We'll put the quarantine cards

on the door, and have our good time, just as we planned."

The next morning, they started off in high spirits.

"How far do we go, Uncle Richard?"

"About as far as Mrs. Sherwood's. In fact it is quite near Mrs. Sherwood's, and to tell you the whole truth, I may as well say right now, the old log house is on part of Mrs. Sherwood's estate."

"Oh, Uncle Richard. Can we go to see her? And Aline?"

"Aline went back to Texas, but she is coming North again before Christmas."

"Can we drive over?"

"Positively not. We still have red cards on the door."

The old log house was found to be in excellent condition. There was a bed-room for the girls on the second floor, which had to be reached by climbing a ladder. An old rope bed stood in one corner. As it was still in very good condition, a tick was filled with

straw, and laid upon the ropes. A few blankets, and the girls' bed was ready. Other ticks were filled for Uncle Richard and the boys, but these had to be laid on the floor of a large room opening off of the living room. There were only three rooms in the house.

Uncle Richard had brought two brooms, and the girls had great fun playing at keeping house. There was a box of candles, and these were fastened to some old saucers they found in the cupboard beside the fireplace. One of the blankets was spread before the fireplace, and this they called their best rug.

The boys helped bring in some old boxes from the barn. When Uncle Richard saw them, he took a door right off its hinges, a funny old door, that was quite flat, no panels in it. Resting this on the boxes, they had a fine table. He had remembered to bring paper tablecloths, and napkins, also paper plates and cups, with "silver" from the ten cent store. Already the place looked like a home.

Then they all went fishing. Ruth and Weezy hated to see minnows used for bait but when Ruth caught a fine bass for dinner, they felt better about it.

"I think we have enough now," said Uncle Richard, after he and Ted had each brought in a fine fish. "We have no ice, so we must only take what we need. Ted and I will get them ready, while Bert and David make the fire. Find some big stones, and be sure to have the opening facing the breeze."

The girls ran into the house for the big skillet, the salt and pepper; then hurried back to put the plates on the table, and place the knives and forks.

When they got back, the fish were browning nicely.

"Oh, Weezy. Doesn't everything smell good. The fish, and the smoke, and the woods, and everything."

"Let's use our bird names, Jenny Wren, 'cause we're in the woods."

"All right, Goldfinch. Where's Eagle?"

"Gone to the spring for water. Look, there's our old picnic stone, up the river, see? I didn't know it was so near. Uncle Richard is fixing stepping stones, so we can get over. Oh, let's run and watch him."

CHAPTER IX.

THE LITTLE ROBBER

THERE came a morning at the camp, when Uncle Richard said he must go to the nearest village for a few supplies. "And take us with you?" asked Weezy.

"No indeed. You are quarantined. Remember there's a red card on the door. I'll not be gone more than an hour. Have lunch on the picnic stone, if you like, and don't let anybody steal the silver."

When he had gone, Ruth and Weezy began to make sandwiches. "What kind do you want, David?"

"Anything. I don't care."

"And what for you, Ted?"

"English walnuts and dates."

"That's a winter sandwich."

"Got any Tuna fish?"

David came back, and helped the girls across to the picnic stone.

(Page 111) — *(The Blue Domers' Nest)*

"Yes, two cans."

"That will be fine."

"Bert, how about you?"

"Roast turkey."

"We haven't any, and you know it. Say quick, what you'll have."

"Peagery Nuggery Buggery."

"All right. We'll fix 'em."

"Weezy, shall we have hot chocolate, or lemonade?"

"Let's have chocolate."

"All right. I'll poke up the fire."

When everything was ready, the boys carried the plates and cups, the sandwiches and chocolate, over to the picnic stone, and then David came back, and helped the girls across.

"Isn't this the wonderfulest place?"

"Let's pretend we're on an island."

"Shipwrecked."

"Yes, and this is all the food we have left."

"My, that's good chocolate. Are there two cups apiece?"

"If you didn't spill any, when you brought it over."

"Look. I dropped my cooky. A fish is eating it."

"Tell him to bring it back. Cookies are getting scarce."

"Perhaps, Uncle Richard will bring some more. He said he might stop at Mrs. Sherwood's on the way back," said Bert. And he added quickly, as he saw an unhappy look on Weezy's face, "Don't think about that old lace, Goldfinch. It wasn't your fault."

"Yes, it was. I should have watched it every single minute."

"Well, anyway, don't think about it now. We're pirates, or shipwrecked sailors, or something and were 'most starved."

David stood up, and looking through his hollowed fists, first up the river, then down; then into the clear sky above them, said sadly, "There is not a sail in sight. Comrades, we are lost. We cannot reach the mainland, and to keep ourselves from starving, we

must catch fish, with our hands, and eat them *raw.*"

Ruth and Weezy shuddered, but all five crouched near the edge of the big stone, and tried to catch minnows.

Ted triumphantly brought up a crawfish.

"Ted. The horrid craw-daddle. Do throw him back."

"It's a lobster. We must eat him."

"Never."

"Do you mean raw?"

"How else, on this rocky ledge. We have no firewood."

Just then a whistle sounded from the shore. There stood Uncle Richard, and the shipwrecked sailors dashed over the stepping-stones, full of eager questions?"

"Did you see Mrs. Sherwood?"

"Did you bring any cookies?"

"Are we going fishing?"

"Is it time to get dinner?"

Weezy alone was silent. With his arm around her, Uncle Richard said, "We are all invited to have dinner at Mrs. Sher-

wood's, and this evening we will go home. The quarantine is over, and so is my vacation."

"Then we'll pack up."

They all returned to the house. Uncle Richard put the door back on its hinges. David swept the floors. Bert and Ted folded the blankets; while the girls gathered up the "silver," saying, "We'll have it to play with, in the tree house."

When everything was ready, when the last of the rubbish had been burned in the fireplace, and they had scampered through the rooms, for the last time, someone said, "There is still an hour left; let's see if we can find a few more bird nests."

David and Ted went off in one direction, while Bert, Ruth and Weezy went in another. Bert found a vireo's nest in a low bush, and Ruth found a quail's rough grassy home.

Weezy, determined to find something, searched high and low; then suddenly

screamed. "Look! Look! Up in this tree. I can't believe it. I can't believe it."

The others came running.

"It's the lace. The lace."

"A robin stole it."

"How can we get it? Oh, isn't it wonderful?"

"I'll get it," said Bert, beginning to climb; but just then Ted and David came running, eager to know what had happened.

"Let David do it. He will be so careful."

Uncle Richard came crashing through the underbrush.

"The lace. What wonderful luck. Better get nest and all, David."

Slowly and patiently the boy's slender fingers loosened the nest; carefully lifting the floating ends of lace, and cautiously slipping down to the ground, with the treasure.

"Yes. It is a robin's nest."

"A robber robin."

"No wonder, Weezy didn't hear a footstep."

"No wonder the robber didn't carry her off too."

"Oh, let's go quick to Mrs. Sherwood."

Weezy's heart sang, as they purred along the highway, and drove into the beautiful estate.

It was David, who carried the nest, but Weezy who told the story; with all her yellow curls bobbing about, as if they were happy too.

Mrs. Sherwood was so astonished, "Dear child, I am so delighted that you found it. You too, shall wear it on your wedding day. Aline will be so happy. That gives me an idea. Let's get a snap-shot of it, to send to her." They went outside, and stood in a little group; Weezy holding high the nest, with the lace floating down upon the grass. Afterward, David helped Mrs. Sherwood take the lace from the nest. And this was not an easy thing to do, as it was held firmly in many places, with mud and twigs.

The wonderful news reached the kitchen, where Liza was making a huge peach short-

cake. Alexander, greatly excited, danced about the kitchen, blowing boisterously upon his harmonica. It was too much for his busy Aunt Liza. Her strong voice rose above the din.

"You Alexander Periander Nickerson! Ef you don' hash yo' noise, an' get outen yere, I's gwine *chase you lost.*"

THE END.

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